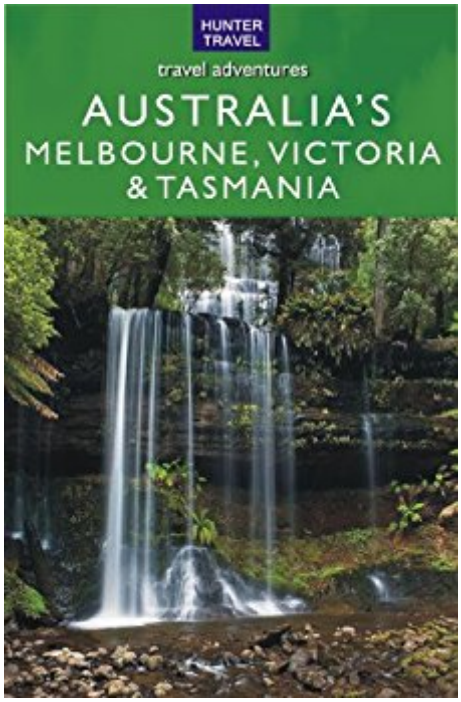
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Synopsis

The author, a native Australian, covers everything you might want to know about Australia - guaranteed! The places to stay, from budget to luxury, rentals to B&Bs, the restaurants, from fast food to the highest quality, the beachwalks and bushwalks, the wildlife and how to see it, exploring the country by air, on water, by bike, and every other way. Following are a few excerpts from the guide: The gathering of landscapes within the compact state of Victoria seem as if a giant had taken different pieces from around the continent, squashed them together and shaken them up, and then tossed them to let them fall where they may. The awesome, wave-lashed coastal edges are among the stateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s classic sights, with crumpled pillars of orange rock stacked tall out in the water. Where the shores arenÃ¢â ¬â„¢t rough, the beaches are silky and white, as soft and tame as a kitten, with cold but gentle waters. Behind this edge are thick patches of temperate rainforests leading up into drier locales, including inland deserts, an unmade bed of mountain foothills and folds, and smooth river marshes and plains. YouÃ¢â ¬â„¢d never expect that much of the terrain here was once actually volcanic, resulting in wild peaks, bluffs, and valleys throughout the center. ThereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s 227,600 sq km of land in the state, and the Great Dividing Range arches through the center of it, with major collections of peaks in the Dandenongs and Macedons. The highest summits are in the east, at 1,986-m (6,514-ft) Mt. Bogong and 1,922-m (6,304-ft) Mt. Feathertop, and snowfields are found throughout the northeastern Australian Alps from June to September. Hemming in the land are 1,800 km (1,116 mi) of coastlines along the Bass Strait and the Southern Ocean, with Melbourne and Geelong fronting the central cut inland to Port Phillip Bay. This is a cool state, akin to the Pacific Northwest or the lower New England states of the U.S., with warm summers but chilling, wet winters. Some regions do dip below freezing, namely the northeastern mountains, while the Gippsland highlands in the east and the western Otway Ranges see more rain than anywhere else. Skip a couple hours south or west and youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll hit the arid Mallee region, and the Little Desert and Big Desert national park areas. Farmlands fill in the gaps, where orchards and vineyards are filled with apples, grapes, oranges, and other citrus fruits. Main crops are grains and vegetables, the fields fronting huge dairy farms or sheep and cattle ranches. Tasmania is offshore from Victoria. The name Ã¢â ¬Å“TasmaniaÃ¢â ¬Â• is one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most intriguing, and it rightfully sounds such as one of the most fascinating places on earth. And, yes, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a heck of a journey to reach this offshore Australian state - but once youÃ¢â ¬â„¢re here, if youÃ¢â ¬â„¢re adventurous, you wonÃ¢â ¬â„¢t want to leave. Indeed, the island state of Tasmania is ripe for adventure. A heart-shaped, mountainous landmass 298 km (185 mi) southeast of the main Australian continent, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s covered with forests, threaded with

rivers, and edged by wild, rugged beaches and bays. Its wilderness comprises an international Heritage Site of its own, filled with some of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s oldest and most unusual plants, animals that are found nowhere else on earth, rock formations that span every geological era, and among the longest underground tunnels ever found. The capital of Hobart, where almost half the islandÃ¢â ¬â„¢s residents live, is tucked into the southeastern edge, and the sleepy northern ferry town of Devonport brings in visitors from the mainland. No one ventures far, though, which leaves the majority of the island open to exploring and free of crowds, even at the loveliest of national wonders such as Tasman National Park in the southeast, Freycinet National Park in the east, and Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park in the west.

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